

Tijeriña House  
333 East Adams Street  
Brownsville  
Cameron County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3286

HABS  
TEX,  
31-BROWN,  
17-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20243

## TIJERIÑA HOUSE

TEX,  
31-BROWN,  
17

Location: 333 East Adams Street, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas.

Present Owner: Zoyla (Zoila) Tijeriña.

Present Occupants: Eulalia ("Lala"), Evangelina, and Zoyla Tijeriña.

Present Use: Family residence.

Significance: Designed and built in 1912 by Tomás Tijeriña, this house is notable for its fine brick detailing, characteristic of Rio Grande Valley architecture. The unusual buttresses were added to help the house withstand winds of hurricane force. The Tijeriña family is descended from the holders of the original Spanish Land Grants to this area, and has played an active part in the history of the valley.

PART I. PHYSICAL HISTORY

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to Zoyla and Eulalia Tijeriña, the house was begun in June 1912. The Tijeriñas moved into the first three rooms in September and the house was completed in December of that year.
2. Architect: Tomás Tijeriña designed the house and supervised its construction.
3. The Tijeriña House is built on Lots 9 and 10 of Block 100 of the Original Townsite of Brownsville, as it appears on the map drawn by George Lyons, Surveyor, ca. 1850. The property has been in the Tijeriña family since 1907 when Lucinda Carcia de Tijeriña purchased it from the New York Brownsville Improvement Company for \$400. (Book U, pp. 155-157.) Records tracing the title can be found at the Cameron County Clerk's Office, Brownsville, Texas.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers, etc.: The 1912 portion of the building was constructed under Tomás Tijeriña's supervision by a bricklayer and a carpenter named Seferino Perez, who appears, in the obituary of Tomás Tijeriña in the Brownsville Herald, April 5, 1932, as an honorary pallbearer at Tijeriña's funeral.
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: Although no original plans of the building are known to survive, a 1914 photograph depicts the house at that time. According to the Tijeriña sisters, the interior walls of the house are brick. Where the sitting room is located, there was originally a brick patio surrounded by porches on three sides. Attached to one of these porches and the bedroom was a frame structure (now demolished)—a three-room, L-shaped house which was "old in 1904" according to the sisters.

This house was the original house on the property and was moved back when the present brick house was erected. Of this house, the front two rooms, which had been a parlor and a bedroom, were combined to form a dining room and the rear room of the ell, serving its original purpose as a kitchen. Servants lived in shacks across the alley from the house. Stables went around the edge of the property, and horses, cows, goats, and pigs were kept on the next lot. The lot the house is located on was originally designated 317 East Adams.

6. Alterations and additions: The January 1914 photograph shows that the buttresses were not on the house at that time. The Tijeriña sisters cannot remember when these were added, and associate them with the house as originally built. This would suggest that they were probably built shortly after 1914. Both the buttresses and the tie-rods securing the corner porch columns were devised by Tomás Tijeriña to strengthen the house against hurricane winds.

In 1918 the brick patio was enclosed to make the present sitting room. This was done so that the daughters, who had come of court- ing age, would have a place to entertain callers. A bedroom to be used by the sons was built above this. The interior walls were covered with sheetrock in 1920.

Around 1934, after the 1933 hurricane, the sons' bedroom was closed off and the stairs to it removed to eliminate the possibility of Mrs. Lucinda Tijeriña falling. At this same time the stables, which had been badly damaged during the hurricane, were replaced by the present garage structure. A few years later the parlor acquired its present form when the front hall was eliminated. Evidence of the partition which created the hall can still be seen in the present parlor.

In 1957 the original frame structure at the rear of the brick por- tion was razed, and the current frame addition was built. The addition was designed by Anna Wheeler Canales, wife of Judge J. T. Canales. Judge Canales was a double first cousin of Tomás Tijeriña and was Eulalia Tijeriña's employer. His younger sister married Raul Tijeriña, son of Tomás and Lucinda. As a Christmas gift to Eulalia Tijeriña, Judge Canales paid off the balance of the note for the addition which totalled \$4,000.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

The Tijeriña family is descended from the original Spanish settlers to the Rio Grande Valley. Tomás Tijeriña is descended from José Salvador de la Garza who held the Spanish grant to the *Espiritu Santo* tract on which Brownsville is located. Tomás' wife, Lucinda Garcia, was descen- ded from the Valli family (also spelled Valli, Vallin, and Balli).

This family held the original San Salvador del Tule Grant on which the *Sal del Rey* (King's Salt) was located. The grandson of the original grantee, Nicolas Balli, became a secular priest and acquired the title to what is now Padre Island. (Scott, pp. 102-106.)

A "Memorandum of the Family Tree of Miss Eulalia Tijeriña," was composed by Judge Canales, and reads as follows:

Miss Eulalia Tijeriña is a descendant of one of the colonists of Jose de Escandon to wit: Jose Salvador de la Garza, original grantee of the Espiritu Santo Grant, in Cameron County, wherein the City of Brownsville is located. Jose Salvador de la Garza was married to Gertrudis de la Garza Falcon, a daughter of Blaas Maria de la Garza Falcon, original founder of Camargo, Mexico. Both were residents and settlers of Camargo, Mexico. They had three children; Francisca Zaviera; Blaas and Maria Margarita. Francisca Xaviera married Jose de Coseascochea and they had two daughters, Estefana and Feliciana. Feliciana married Juan Jose Tijeriña, and they had ten children, one of them was Antonio Tijeriña, who married Catarina Cavazos, and they had four children, Dolores, Tomás, Santiago, and Miguel. Tomás married Lucinda Garcia Balli, and they had ten children, one of whom is Miss Eulalia Tijeriña.

The Tijeriña family has continued to be active in Cameron County. In addition to ranching, Tomás Tijeriña was a deputy sheriff, an inspector of hides and animals, a customs officer, and was active in the Democratic Party. According to his obituary in the Brownsville Herald, Mr. Tijeriña participated in helping to restore order during the Fort Brown riots in 1906 and the bandit raids in 1913. His double first cousin, Judge José Tomás Canales, graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1899 and was a member of the Texas Legislature from 1905 to 1912, and again from 1917 to 1920. He conducted the 1919 investigation of the Texas Rangers and spearheaded legislation to correct their abuses. J. T. Canales was also the author and editor of several books highlighting the Mexican contribution to Texas independence and history. (From the book jacket of La Guerra de Tejas.) Additionally Judge Canales was one of the founders of LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and served as its fourth president. (Biographical information in the files of the Institute for Texas Cultures.)

Eulalia Tijeriña was Judge Canales' secretary for over twenty-five years and Judge Canales' wife designed the present back wing of the Tijeriña House. Evangelina Tijeriña was in charge of the Brownsville city cemetery and Zoila Tijeriña worked in the County Clerk's Office of Cameron County for more than 20 years.

Zoila Tijeriña captured a Mexican bandit during the bandit troubles in 1915. She was teaching school out in the country near the Via Nueva Pumping Plant and as a student was saddling her horse at the end of the day, when a boy came up, asking to be taken to the river.

The river was the border between the United States and Mexico. Zoyla told him she would take him there and that he could walk alongside her horse. Since a train had been wrecked by bandits a few days earlier, Zoyla suspected that the boy might be a member of the bandit gang and attempting to escape to Mexico. She rode for about a mile with him walking alongside until they reached her uncle's place near the pumping plant. Here she telephoned her father who was a deputy sheriff. Mr. Tijeriña and others came and got the boy who eventually turned state's witness against the other bandits who wrecked the train. Zoyla's bravery becomes even more striking when the events of the train wreck are considered. As described by John R. Peavey, a former Texas Ranger, it was one of the worst incidents in the years of bandit raids in the Cameron County area. The bandits derailed the night train from Harlingen to Brownsville, and killed several passengers, on October 17, 1915. The passengers who survived were so terrified that they refused to come out of the train's restrooms where they had barricaded themselves, even after the Texas Rangers had arrived.

The Tijeriña House has been the scene of activities reflecting the civic interests of the family. On June 3, 1913, the Battle of Matamoros was fought between federal troops in Matamoros and revolutionary units led by Lucio Blanco. The federal troops were loyal to the Huerta government, then in power. Blanco supported General Venustiano Carranza, the leader of the Constitutionalists. Blanco and his troops, called "Carranzistas" were victorious although they lost approximately 250-400 men when they took Matamoros. Only 68 of the Federalists were killed. (Stambaugh.)

On the day of the battle, more than fifty refugees from the conflict were encamped for three to four weeks on the property. Dr. Miguel Barragan, Mayor of Matamoros, and his family, stayed in the house. The doctor's son-in-law, Juan Cross, was black, which led to considerable criticism of Tomás Tijeriña by Brownsville Citizens, since the Brownsville race riot had taken place in 1906. Tijeriña ignored this criticism and continued to offer hospitality to Dr. Barragan and the Cross family. Zoyla and Eulalia Tijeriña remember their father slaughtering calves and goats, and bringing back coffee, sugar, flour, etc. in barrels and sacks to feed the refugees, many of whom were wounded.

In 1916 or 1917, John Nance Garner, at that time a United States Congressman from Texas, had lunch at the Tijeriña House while he was campaigning in Brownsville. When Tomás Tijeriña died on April 1, 1932, a telegram of condolence was received from Vice President Garner.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: An original photograph of the house dated in pencil on the back, "January 1914" is in the possession of Zoyla and Eulalia Tijeriña, 333 East Adams Street, Brownsville, Texas 78520. This shows the house without buttresses before the patio was walled in. (HABS photocopy.)

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Interviews with Zoila and Eulalia Tijeriña on June 21, 23, and 24, 1977, in Brownsville, gave the physical history of the house, information about the aftermath of the Battle of Matamoros, and the visit of John Nance Garner. The Tijeriña sisters currently occupy the Tijeriña House which their father built.

A genealogy of the paternal side of the Tijeriña family was done by Judge Ganales for Eulalia Tijeriña who gave it to HABS.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Canales, José T. La Guerra de Tejas (The War of Texas). San Antonio: Artes-Graficas, 1959. (In possession of Eulalia Tijeriña.)

Peavey, John R. Echoes from the Rio Grande. Brownsville: Springman-King Gompany, 1963.

Scott, Florence Johnson. Historical Heritage of the Lower Rio Grande. San Antonio: The Naylor Gompany, 1937. (Hunter Collection, Texas Southmost College, Brownsville.)

Stambaugh, J. Lee and Lillian J. The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. San Antonio: The Naylor Gompany, 1954. pp. 207-9.

The Brownsville Herald, April 5, 1932. "Last Rites for Valley Pioneer." (Obituary of Tomás Tijeriña.)

Prepared by: Betty Bird  
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1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This brick house is unique with its stringcourse connecting the openings and buttresses on the sides.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately forty feet along the main facade, the house is approximately seventy feet in length. Its front facade is five bays wide, the side of the original section four bays. It is one story high.

2. Foundation: Foundations are brick on original house, and concrete on rear wing and front porch.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The original front portion of the house is common bond brick, painted ivory, with buttresses at the corners and on the northwest wall, and a decorative stringcourse connecting the openings. The stringcourse is a stretcher at the top and bottom, with a header set on the diagonal, projecting, between the two stretchers. The buttresses slope to the stringcourse from about half-way up, and are not integral with the walls, having been added later.

The rear portion of the house has wooden siding with corner boards.

4. Structural system, framing: The house has brick load-bearing walls and frame construction.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: There is a concrete porch extending across the entire front facade, and where most other such porches have flat or shed roofs, this one has hipped ends. The roof is supported by six wooden columns, which are fluted, and painted white. There is a simple capital and no base on each column. One concrete step leads up to the porch from the ground. The ceiling is of wood beaded paneling, and the cornice is boxed. There is a metal tie-rod on each end extending through the architrave. (This may also be a protection against high winds.)

On the southeast facade, near the center, there is a tiled stoop with one tiled step between a short, flat pedestal at each side. At the rear door is a concrete slab patio, with a small pent roof directly above the door.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is the center of the southwest facade opens into the parlor. The doorway has a wood surround, wood sill and threshold, and a wood panel door. The doorway has a one-light transom panel above an arched brick hood, with an arched wood panel between the transom panel and hood. The door, original to the house, has a scenic frosted glass panel at the top, with a drip mold above and below it. There are three wood panels below the glass. A wooden framed screen door is on the outside.

The rear door from the kitchen has wood surround and wood sill. The door has a wood panel below, with a screen panel above. There is a six-light sliding panel on the inside that slides up to close the screen panel.

There is a pair of doors similar to the kitchen door which leads from the sitting room to the outside. These doors have only a three-light sliding panel.

- b. Windows and shutters: Wooden, double-hung windows have one-over-one light sashes, wood surrounds and wood-framed insect screens. The windows in the brick portion of the house have a pair of adjustable, hinged, wooden shutters, painted dark green. The windows on the front, left, and right sides, have an arched brick hood over each. There are three windows on the inside of the house which have been closed up.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof over the brick portion consists of a three-hipped roof forming a U shape, with no opening between the extensions of the U. The rear portion has a gabled roof, and the front porch, a shed or pent roof with hipped ends. All are covered with wood shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice on the front and brick portion of the house is boxed, with a frieze board under the cornice at the main house. The wooden portion has an open cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: The entrance in the center of the front facade opens into the parlor, but was formerly divided from the parlor by a center hall. The parlor has two single windows on each the southwest and northwest walls. There is a door in the center of the southeast wall leading into a bedroom, and two doors on the northeast wall, one leading into a bedroom and one into the sitting room. The south bedroom has two single windows on the southwest wall and one on the southeast wall. A door on the northeast leads into the sitting room. The sitting room has a double doorway leading to the exterior in the center of the southeast wall, flanked by a window on each side. There are two doorways on the northeast wall, one leading into the dining room, and one into a hall. Two doors on the northwest lead into two bedrooms. The bedrooms have back-to-back fireplaces on the inside wall, with cupboards on one side and a connecting door on the other. Each has one window on the northwest wall and the rear bedroom has a window on the northeast, near the corner. The small hallway, in the frame portion of the house, leads to a bathroom on the left and a storage room at the end. The storage room has a large closet on the northwest. The dining room, also in the frame addition, has two windows on the southeast wall, a doorway from the hall on the northwest, and a door to the kitchen on the northeast. The large L-shaped kitchen has an eating space next to the dining room. There are two windows on the southeast wall and two on the northeast. The doorway to the exterior on the northeast divides the kitchen cabinets. At the end of the L on the northwest is a small pantry.



2. Flooring: Flooring is of narrow wood boards, original to the house, with rugs and carpets on most floors. The bathroom has a ceramic tile floor.
3. Walls and ceilings: Walls in the parlor, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, hall, and bathroom have modern wood paneling. There is a ceramic tile wainscot in the bathroom. The south bedroom has walls of painted gypsum board and the other two bedrooms have wallpaper over gypsum board. Ceilings in the parlor and bedrooms have beaded wood paneling; in the hall, dining room, and storage room, ceilings are of gypsum board; in the bath, kitchen, and sitting room, ceilings are of modern wood paneling.
4. Doorways and doors: Doorways have simple wood surrounds and doors are wood paneled.
5. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: The fireplace in the first bedroom has a plaster surround and an inset wooden mantel between splayed walls above the fireplace. There is a simple firebox opening and a concrete hearth recessed below the wood floor. The other bedroom fireplace has a ceramic tile surround projecting from the face of the wall and extending around the corner, forming a small mantel shelf. It has a simulated-marble stone hearth. The cupboards built in on one side of each fireplace consist of two small doors at the bottom and two larger doors at the top.

There is a linen cabinet with numerous doors built across the north-east wall of the bathroom.

6. Furnishings: The house still retains much of its original furnishings. The front southeast bedroom has an elaborate bedstead of fumed oak, characteristically 1912, with hard canopy or half-tester; the front side bedroom has Tomás and Lucinda Tijeriña's bedroom furniture, and the second bedroom contains the bed in which Antonio Tijeriña, Tomás' father, was born. The dining-room furniture was bought by Judge J. T. Canales and Anna Wheeler Canales in Laredo in 1913, and was given to the Tijeriña sisters in 1957, when the addition was completed. In the kitchen is the telephone that was put in the house in 1916.
7. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Heating is by natural-gas space heaters.
  - b. Lighting: There is a crystal hanging light fixture in the parlor in a seven-branch candelabrum with brass fittings and crystal baubles. The fixture at the entrance is a dome shape, of crystal baubles with six small lamps projecting horizontally inside the dome.

The fixture in the southeast corner bedroom has three brass arms, each with an etched glass chimney over the bulb, and crystal baubles. In the north bedroom there is a six-branch hanging brass candelabrum fixture, and in the other bedroom there is a hanging brass fixture with a large frosted center shade and three frosted trumpet-shaped shades hanging from the center shade. A large Tiffany-style dome lamp hangs over the dining table.

c. Plumbing: Plumbing is modern.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces southwest, on the northeast side of the street, in a residential neighborhood. The lot to the northwest, a part of this property, is vacant, but has several large trees and some shrubbery on it. There are other trees at the rear. A concrete driveway extends along the southeast side of the site to a brick garage at the rear. The garage has a flat roof, is divided into two parts, and has no doors. Part of the left side is a storage room. There is a concrete patio along the rear of the house and adjoining the driveway. A chain-link type of metal fence extends along the rear property line and along the northwest property line of the vacant lot.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

At the suggestion of a national preservation consultant, Ellen Beasley, this project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, in cooperation with the Brownsville Historical Association and the Brownsville City Planning Department. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1977 at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office, Brownsville, Texas, by John P. White (Associate Professor, Texas Technological University) Project Supervisor; Betty Bird (University of Virginia) Project Historian; and Student Assistant Architects Scott Deneroff (University of Maryland), Susan Dornbusch (University of Virginia), Matthew Lowry (University of Pennsylvania), Eduardo Luaces (University of Florida), and Alan Willig (the City College of the City University of New York). Special assistance and support were provided to the HABS team by Mrs. Mary Simmons, Mrs. Sally Fleming, Miss Theresa Champion, and Mr. Calvin Walker of the Brownsville Historical Association; and by Mr. Mario Moreno, Mr. Richard Waldman, Mrs. Graciela Salinas, and Mr. Larry Brown of the Brownsville City Planning Department. Archival photographs of the project were made in February 1979 by Bill Engdahl, of Hedrich-Blessing, Chicago, Illinois. Editing and final preparation of the documentation was carried out in the HABS Washington office by Lucy Pope Wheeler of the HABS professional staff.